

A MERE MAN

BY

EDITH PALMER PAINTON



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ELDRIDGE ENTERTAINMENT HOUSE
Franklin, Ohio

A MERE MAN

A Study in Feminine Color

By EDITH PALMER PAINTON.

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CHARACTERS

Mrs. Green, A Widow.

Mrs. Bessie Brown, A Bride, Her Daughter.

Grace Green, Her Youngest Daughter.

Elizabeth White, A School Teacher.

Mrs. Pamela Black, A Divorcee.

Dr. Gray.

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A MERE MAN.

(Scene: A Parlor. Lounge at back, two or three easy chairs. A desk, stand or table at Left.)

(Mrs. Green sits at desk, writing many notes. Bessie, wearing wraps, sits on lounge, looking very disconsolate. Grace sits in chair, with embroidery work, listening very intently, while Mrs. Green talks between her writing, a constant string of impatience. Must show her annoyance in every word she writes, in the energy with which she folds notes and stuffs them in envelopes, seals, etc. Desk faces girls so she looks at them whenever making a point.)

Mrs Green It's certainly too bad, Bessie, and I'm sorry, of course, that it has had to turn out this way so soon; but—(Pauses, sighs, resumes writing)

Bessie (protesting) Mamma!

Mrs Green You know you just would get married. Wouldn't she, Grace? (Grace nods) Nothing that I, nor your Aunt Elizabeth, nor your Cousin Pamela, nor—nor—any other woman of experience, could say about the darkness and difficulties of a matrimonial career would have the slightest effect upon you. Am I not speaking the truth, Bessie? (*Bessie sobs aloud*) Bessie, I insist that you answer me.

Bessie (faintly) Yes, Mamma.

Mrs Green We had educated you, hadn't we? (*Bessie nods sadly*) We had given you the benefit of our experience, had we not, over and over again? (Pause. *Bessie sobs.* *Mrs Green*, writing rapidly, with lips compressed. She pauses, looks up, and speaks sternly) Answer me, Bessie. Had we not?

Bessie Yes—(sob)—Mamma?

Mrs Green (complacently) Then I can't feel that I am in any way to blame, can I, Bessie? (Pause. *Bessie sobs*) Bessie, why don't you speak? You put me all out of patience. Can I?

Bessie (in choked voice) No, mamma.

Mrs Green (with satisfaction) That's what I thought about it; but, of course, a mother can never be sure how her daughter is going to think about it. She may bring her up, teach her, train, tell her every step of the way she should go; then, when she gets able to walk alone, as she thinks—(*Pauses with eloquent gesture*)

Grace (giggles) Away she'll go!

Mrs Green Grace, such a remark is altogether uncalled for from you. Here is your poor sister, struggling with her tears, wounded by the cruelties and densities of a mere man, and you—who, I hope, are taking a good clear warning from this pitiful living example before your eyes,—what do you do? Why, you sit and make jokes. You laugh. Shame on you! (*resumes writing*)

Grace But mamma! (*no answer*) Mamma! (*no answer*) Wonder if she wants me to cry, too! (*Bessie tosses head, but Mrs Green does not look up*) I do wish you would get through with that writing some time, Mamma!

Mrs Green Well—(*looks up impatiently*) What is it? These invitations are important. They must go out tonight. What did you want to say?

Grace What I want to know is, what has Dick done?

Mrs Green If you are speaking of Richard Brown, Grace, the unprincipled young apology for a man, who has so grossly deceived and mistreated the woman he married and swore to love, honor and protect—(*Bessie rises, paces floor at back sadly*)

Grace Yes, yes, Mamma—don't waste any more breath. I was speaking of Dick.

Mrs Green Richard sounds more becoming. (*trying to write*)

Grace (giggles) Same old Dick.

Mrs Green (still trying to write) Richard sounds better I say.

Grace I prefer Dick myself.

Mrs Green (*looks up and gestures with pen impatiently*) I insist upon Richard, do you understand? (*looks fixedly at her a moment, and resumes work*)

Bessie (*stops behind Grace's chair and leans over it*) O Grace! Grace! what does it matter? Do let Mamma have her own way.

Grace (*giggles*) Let her?--Humph!

Bessie O Grace, don't!

Grace Don't let her? Well wasn't that what I was trying? But pshaw! Could anybody on earth keep her from it?

Bessie But you know, Grace—

Grace (*looks up roguishly*) Did anybody ever?

Bessie Why—why—not as I know of.

Grace (*giggles*) Nor anybody else. (*Mrs Green looks up at the laugh*) What I want to know, Mamma is this, as I said before, or tried to—what has Richard done? (*Bessie resumes walk, hands clasped behind back, looking down*)

Mrs Green Done? Done? You can ask that? When you see her here in tears, the bride of only a month, her eyes red and unsightly from weeping, her cheeks robbed of their beauty, her lips bereft of their bloom, do I need to ask what he has done? Have I not eyes? Can I not see? (*resumes writing*)

Bessie (*pauses by Grace again*) Honest, Grace, do I look as bad as that?

Grace I should worry.

Bessie Why, I must be a regular fright.

Grace (*teasingly*) It's a wonder that Dick—

Mrs Green (*looking up suddenly*) Richard!

Grace (*in confusion*) Yes, I mean Richard.

Bessie What were you going say about Dick? (*Mrs Green looks at her sternly, she pauses, bites lip, and corrects herself*) Richard?

Grace I—I— (catching *Mrs Green's* eye and hesitating) Why, I forgot. Nothing much.

Mrs Green There's nothing much that can be said about him. (resumes work)

Bessie (walks protestingly to front of desk, speaks pleadingly) But, Mamma—

Mrs Green (writes busily for a moment, then looks up) Or, for that matter, about any other mere man. But my skirts are clear. I told you so. I can only hope, *Grace*, that you, at least will be able to profit by this heart-rending example of a young husband's depravity.

Bessie (wincing at the word) Depravity! Oh! (turns to *Grace*)

Grace Depravity! Ah!

Mrs Green Depravity's the word, first, last, and all the time for a mere man. Your father wasn't exactly what might be called the very worst man in the world, I don't suppose; but if he was within a thousand miles of the best, Heaven save us from the rest! (resumes writing)

Bessie Why, Mamma!

Grace Isn't it awful?

Mrs Green (after busy pause) Of course he's dead now, poor man. And I know what it is to go through the fiery furnace, and not—not—well, not be burned entirely to ashes. But I feel there's still the smell of fire on my garments, and that there always will be. If I had only lived up to my ambitions, and been an out-and-out old maid like your Aunt Elizabeth. But—

Grace Where would we have been, Mamma?

Mrs Green (sternly) *Grace*! Such questions are anything but becoming in a girl of your age.

Bessie But—Mamma!

Mrs Green At any rate, your poor sister here would not have been the victim of a male creature's depravity.

Grace Depravity's a big word.

Mrs Green It just fits Richard Brown—and every other of his sex. Dear me! When I stop to look back over our family history, it just seems to me that the Green's have had more than their share of trouble in the matrimonial line. Poor Pamela Black was a Green, you know, and so was Elizabeth White's mother. And see what they both had to undergo, poor things. Why their stories would fill six volume novels, and be the sensation of the year. But thank goodness! Elizabeth herself is wise enough to steer clear of anything and everything in the shape of a mere man, just as poor Pamela wishes she had. (*resumes writing*)

Bessie Aren't you nearly through with those notes, Mamma? (*walks to desk*)

Mrs Green (*writing rapidly, without looking up*) Why, I don't know. Why? Anything special?

Bessie No—only—

Mrs Green (*after busy pause, looking up*) Only what?

Bessie (*retreats to lounge and sits heavily*) I don't know what to do, that's all.

Mrs Green Do? Why stay right where you are, that's all.

Grace On that lounge?

Mrs Green What else is there for you to do but to stay with the mother who brought you up? Do you think I'd let you go back to such a creature? What is he anyway, but—

All A mere man!

(*Pamela Black enters right*)

Pamela Nobody home? Oh, here you are!

All Pamela Black! (*Mrs Green and Grace rise to greet her*)

Pamela Sure enough. How are you all? Why, Bessie Brown, what are you doing here? (*goes to her, greeting her heartily*)

Grace (*giggles*) Crying.

Pamela Crying? (*takes Bessie's face between hands*) Why, so she has been, bless her poor dear little soul. I might have guessed it, though. Hasn't she been married a whole month? What else could you expect? (*throws arms around Mrs Green as she rises from Bessie*) How are you, dear Cousin Lucinda?

Mrs Green (*with her hands on Pamela's shoulders*) In excellent health of body, Pamela—excellent! But ever since that poor child came home, and I saw in her eyes the sorrow that was threatening to overwhelm her, I must admit that my health of mind has not been of the best. I expected it, of course—

Pamela Didn't we all? O didn't we all? I hope this will be a good warning to you, Grace.

Grace It certainly ought to be, the way everybody hammers it in, but I can't find out what has happened.

Pamela Happened? What difference can it possibly make what has happened? The main thing is that the inevitable "It" has happened. It's enough for us to behold the results. (*Sits sofa, gushingly*) Poor Bessie! Poor little woman who just simply had to learn her lesson for herself.

Bessie But, Pamela, you see—

Pamela Yes, dear, I see—what I wish I didn't see.

Mrs Green (*sits near lounge*) But I can't see that there is anything or anybody to blame but herself, Pamela. We all warned her—

Pamela Indeed we did! And we all gave her the whole history of our own terrible mistakes and failures, to keep her from making a worse one—

Mrs Green Indeed we did!

Pamela What will Elizabeth say?

Grace Why, she'll say, just like all the rest of the family, "I told you so!"

Mrs Green (*reprovingly*) Grace! Grace!

Grace (*insistently*) Won't she?

Mrs Green Why—er—er—probably, but—

Grace (*wisely*) I told you so!

Pamela Where is Elizabeth, anyway? Isn't she boarding with you now?

Grace Of course. We couldn't keep house without Aunt Elizabeth's advice! But her school doesn't close, you see, until three-thirty, and she usually has a lot of visiting to do with the rest of the school-teachers, and then there's always bushels of papers for her to look over, and her lessons to look up for the next day.

Bessie She's a very busy woman.

Mrs Green A very *useful* woman. She's just the kind I always wanted Bessie to be.

Bessie (*mournfully*) I wasn't meant for it, Mama.

Pamela (*caressing her*) What were you meant for child? (*touches eyes*) This?

Bessie I—I—I—I suppose so.

Mrs Green Anyhow, you can see for yourself that it's what she has got.

Pamela Poor child. If I had that Richard Brown by the neck, I'd—I'd—I'd—

Grace (*giggles*) Squeeze him?

Mrs Green Grace!

Pamela I'd twist it for him. I'd certainly put him out of business for one while.

Mrs Green It doesn't take much to put a mere man out of business.

Grace But, Pamela do you know a thing about what poor Richard has done?

Mrs Green) (*with withering emphasis*) Poor
Pamela) Richard!

Grace Well, rich Richard, bad Richard, wicked Richard, naughty, naughty, naughty Richard—any kind of Richard you like him to be, if you please, if you'll only some of you tell me something about what terrible, awfully unpardonable sin he^t has committed to make Bessie take on like this?

Mrs Green The idea!

Pamela Can't you see?

Grace Nothing but Bessie's crying—none of the whys and wherefores thereof! I'm only an ignorant young girl, you know, Mamma, and I—I—I might follow in my sister's foot-steps if you didn't instruct me better. And wouldn't that be awful to relate?

Pamela Grace, if you dare!

Grace I don't dare! That's why I am asking these things of you who know! What—has—Richard done?

Pamela Never mind, Grace, what Richard has done! I don't know, myself, and I don't want to know. It's enough for me to see your poor sister in the condition she is in without going into any of the "behind the scene" rehearsals! I see results—effects! Why bother about causes?

Grace Because causes can sometimes be removed!

Pamela Then remove Richard!

Grace (*In pretended horror*) Kill him?

Pamela Why, no, not exactly. Do as I did with Henry Black! Divorce him!

Grace (*Greatly relieved*) Oh!

Bessie But divorce proceedings are so horrible, Pamela!

Pamela Matrimonial proceedings are worse! Girls, listen to me! (*Grace and Bessie sit by her on sofa—she between them*) You go back to your writing, Lucinda—I know you're dying to. (*Mrs. Green returns to desk*) I want to talk to these girls like a Dutch uncle. Now, Bessie, I am quite sure that you will be able to understand everything I say. As for Grace,—well, you must just take it all on trust, dearie, and may Heaven send that you may never know by experience what I have had to learn that bitter way. Never get married, my child,—never, if you live to be a hundred years old. -Live your own life in your

own way, and never, never, never give one thought to any mere man!

Grace But, Pamela——

Pamela Yes!

Grace Would you have me an old maid?

Pamela I would have you—just that!

Grace Like Aunt Elizabeth?

Pamela Why not?

Grace She's—she's—O I don't know!

Bessie Just what everybody else says about her!

Mrs. Green (*Looking up from her writing*) She's a brave, strong, noble, independent woman, that's what she is! And if you girls only turn out as well—I mean you, of course, Grace, for Bessie is already besond all hope——

Bessie Poor me!

Mrs. Green I shall certainly be proud of you.

Bessie But go on with your story, Pamela. I'm very much interested.

Grace Me, too! I'm hoping I may find out something about what Dick—I mean Richard—has been doing!

Mrs. Green Grace!

Grace Never said it, Mamma! Never even thought it.

Bessie Do hurry on, Pamela.

Pamela O yes, my story! I mean, rather, my lesson—for that's what I trust it will be to you. Well, girls, once—not more than fifty years ago, though I declare it seems a hundred!—I was a young and happy girl, as ignorant and innocent, and folks said, as pretty and graceful as either of you!

Girls O my! (*Protesting tone*)

Bessie As if you weren't perfectly lovely all the time!

Pamela I hoped to be an actress, or an opera singer, or a—a—a—something like that—

Grace (*Enthusiastically*) A chorus girl?

Pamela Well, no, not that, of course, but something before the public, you know, in the way of singing or speaking. I never expected to be crushed and fairly ground beneath the heel of a mere man!

Mrs. Green (*Looking up from writing*) I should hope not! Neither did any of us expect it of you!

Pamela But it happened—even to me. I lost my beauty—

Grace Never!

Pamela O yes, I did.

Bessie Did you advertise?

Pamela What?

Bessie I—I—I beg your pardon, Pamela. I guess—I—wasn't noticing just what you said. You lost something, you said.

Pamela I certainly did. I lost also my energy and ambition, I lost all my charm, I lost even hope. Behold me now, a mere wreck of what might once have been a happy woman. (*weeps*).

Bessie O don't cry, Pamela. Don't cry. You'll soil your pretty dress. Besides, you are free now, and—

Pamela (*Jumps up impetuously*) Yes, free! free! free! And if every girl would take my advice, every woman would be forever free from the toils of any mere man. (*walks up and down in excitement*)

Bessie But how do you live, Pamela? You don't teach you don't preach—you have to have money. How do you—

Pamela (*Pauses to wave hand grandly*) Alimony, my dear girl. Alimony. It's the only way in the world to get even with the wretches. A hundred-and-twenty-five a month, and the home for mine. That isn't so bad, you see.

Grace But, Pamela, would you—even you—actually condescend to accept money for your support from a mere man.

Pamela Why not? He owes it to me. It doesn't half begin to pay for my wounded feelings, my broken heart, my blasted hopes, my ruined dreams, and my wasted life. (*drops to sofa weeping*).

Mrs. Green (*Rising*) O the cruelties and brutalities to be laid at the door of—

All (*Rising indignantly*) A mere man.

(*Elizabeth White enters right. Pamela sinks upon sofa again. The others advance to greet Elizabeth*)

Elizabeth (*Removing hat, jacket, gloves, etc*) Now, what's the matter with Pamela?

Grace Same old story.

Elizabeth (*In surprise, over shoulder, hanging wraps on hook*) What? Does she have to have it, too?

Mrs. Green Have what?

Elizabeth (*Coming back to group*) Vaccination.

All (*In consternation*) Vaccination?

Elizabeth Yes. It's one of the things that made me late tonight. First, I sent Johnnie Jones to the post office with a letter, and he got lost in some of the halls, and couldn't find the right door out, and we had no end of trouble over that.

Grace Were the electric lights on?

Elizabeth Don't mention them. The school-teachers turned out in a body to find him. Well, then the board had a meeting and decided that no teacher could hold their place any longer unless she was immediately vaccinated. I phoned to Dr. Russell. He was out of town, the office girl said, and wouldn't be home for three weeks. He had left a stranger—a Dr. Grey—in charge of his affairs. Dear me. What could I do? (*sinks wearily into chair*).

Mrs. Green Hideous.

Grace Horrible.

Pamela Of course it was.

Bessie What *did* you do, Aunt Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Why, hello, Bessie. You here, too? I was so excited, I declare I hadn't noticed you. What's gone wrong?

Bessie (*Confused*) O n-n-nothing.

All (*Emphatically*) Nothing?

Bessie O well,—nothing much.

Elizabeth (*Eying her insistently*) But what?

Bessie Just—er—Dick.

Elizabeth (*Sniffs*) Humph! Same as nothing.

Pamela Of course.

Elizabeth But—I told you so.

Grace (*Triumphantly to others*) I told you so.

Elizabeth Every mere man can be absolutely depended upon, to go wrong sooner or later. Usually sooner.

All Sure.

Grace But I don't know what he's done.

Elizabeth Neither do I. What does that matter? He's bound to go wrong, whatever he does. It's the nature of a mere man.

Bessie But do go on with your story, Aunt Elizabeth.

Elizabeth O yes, my story. Well, of course, there was nothing else for me to do. I had to call for this Dr. Gray.

Pamela (*Eagerly*) What was he like?

Grace Is he old or young?

Mrs. Green Married or single?

Elizabeth Don't ask me. He wasn't in. Besides, how was I concerned about the outside or the inside of any mere man.

Mrs. Green Where was he?

Elizabeth He had a case in the country, and wouldn't be in for an hour.

Bessie What did you do?

Elizabeth Why, the next best thing, of course. I

left my name and address, with instructions for him to call here at once upon his return.

All (Each fixing belt, ribbons, hair, etc.) Here?

Elizabeth Of course. Where else? It's very humiliating, I am sure, to have to be under obligations of any kind to a mere man, but if one must—why just get it over with in the quickest and easiest way possible.

All Of course.

Pamela (Examining face in hand-mirror, powders nose, arranges hair, etc.) How soon do you think he will be here, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth O I'm sure I don't know. It's time for him now, but one can never depend for one minute upon any move of a mere man.

Grace (Looking over Pam's shoulder into the mirror, straightening hair, etc.) I wonder if he has an automobile.

Elizabeth Trust the creature to look out for his own comfort—if he runs over the rest of the town.

Mrs. Green (Has been making frantic efforts to see over Pam's shoulder, without success. Gets nervous) Do let me take that glass a minute, Pamela. (Primps before it) I wonder how old he is.

Bessie (Smiling at the eagerness of the others with a don't-care air of one who is "settled" in life) I wonder if he's going to be here permanently.

Pamela I wonder if he is married.

Grace Or wants to be.

Elizabeth (Rising) Well, all I wonder is, whether or not he knows his business. It would be the biggest wonder of all if he did. The man of it. Dear me. (Looks around to see if the glass is in use. Sees Mrs. Green still occupied with it, and feels hair nervously) I wonder how my hair looks?

Mrs. Green Fine.

Elizabeth (Whirling around for inspection) Would you change your dress?

Pamela No.

Bessie You look lovely, Aunt Elizabeth. I'm sure he'll be captivated.

Elizabeth Humph! No mere man for Elizabeth White.

Bessie I did not say that *you* would be captivated, Auntie. I know you are altogether too superior to those things. But he—how could the hardest, very strongest kind of a mere man be proof against your womanly fascinations. Not this Dr. Gray, I'll warrant.

Elizabeth (*Flattered*) Nonsense, child. You talk like a baby. (*sits.*)

Pamela More like a bride.

Mrs. Green Don't tease her, girls. She can't help it now. We warned her all we could before she got into the matrimonial harness. There's nothing left for us to do now, but help her make the most of a bad bargain. If she had only been such a woman as you, Elizabeth.

All Yes.

Grace But what has Richard been doing to her, that's what I want to know.

All (*Shaking warning finger at Grace*) Hush.

Elizabeth What's this doctor going to do to me, that's what I want to know. O dear, to think I would have to submit to having one of the creatures near me, after all these years.

Mrs. Green Where are you going to have it done?

Elizabeth (*innocently*) Why, right here in the house, of course. (*Rising*)

Mrs. Green No, no! On what part of your body?

Elizabeth O dear. I hadn't thought of that. (*turns hand over, hesitating, in great embarrassment*) Would my wrist do, I wonder?

Pamela O mercy, no. Away up on your arm.

Elizabeth (*Shocked, runs hand up arm*) O my. Must I? I never can. I'll faint. I'll scream. I'll

blush away down to my toe-nails! I'll never get over it. I'll never dare look anybody in the face again. It's awful! awful! (*Sinks to sofa, overcome with emotion*).

Pamela Cheer up, Elizabeth, the worst is yet to come.

Mrs. Green Don't let him know you care. Remember, after all, he's just—

All (*Scornfully*) A mere man.

(*Dr. Gray enters L. All rise in surprise*)

Dr. Gray (*Uncertainly*) The maid told me that I was expected.

Mrs. Green Expected.

Dr. Gray Yes, and that I should come right in.

Mrs. Green There must be some mistake, madam. I expected no one—that is no lady. You must have the wrong house.

Dr. Gray No, I am sure I am right. A lady—a school-teacher, I believe—'phoned for me to come here.

Pamela You, Elizabeth? Why, what—

Dr. Gray (*Consults note book*) A case of vaccination, I think.

All (*In disappointed surprise*) Ah!

Elizabeth Then you are—

Dr. Gray Dr. Gray.

All *Dr. Gray.*

Dr Gray (*bowing low*) At your service, ladies.

Grace You must excuse us, doctor. We were surprised to see you. We thought you were—or would be—I mean—

All A man!

Dr Gray I see.

Mrs Green Won't you sit down?

Dr Gray Are you Miss White?

Mrs Green No, I am Mrs. Green. (*shakes hands, presents Bessie*) And this is my daughter, Bessie.

Dr Gray (*offers hand*) Pleased to meet you, Miss Green.

Bessie No, my name is Brown. (*presents Grace*) And this is my sister, Grace.

Dr Gray (*offers hand*) Pleased to meet you, Miss Brown.

Grace No, my name is Green—just like Mamma's. (*presents Pamela*) And this is my cousin, Pamela.

Dr Gray (*offers hand*) Pleased to meet you, Miss Green.

Pamela No, I am Mrs. Black. And this is my cousin, Elizabeth.

Dr Gray (*offers hand*) Glad to know you, too, Miss Black.

Elizabeth No, I am Miss White, your patient.

Dr Gray I see, I see. Quite a study in color.

Elizabeth (*offers chair*) Do sit down!

Dr Gray (*sits*) I hope you are not too much disappointed that I am not a man.

All (*in vigorous protest*) O no!

Dr Gray I am Dr. Russell's niece, you see, and when he was called away, he sent for me to take care of his practice while he was out of town. I am sorry if—

Mrs Green You needn't be, Dr. Gray. We have no use whatever for mere men in this establishment. I, fortunately, am a widow; my sister here, Miss White, whom you have called to—to—to operate on, is a—a—a—well, a spinster,—from choice, you understand, quite altogether from choice.

Grace (*aside to Bessie*) Whose choice, I wonder?

Mrs Green My cousin, Mrs. Black, is a—a—a—well, a separated woman,—a legal widow as you might say, and my daughter, Mrs. Brown ought to be. So you see, we are more than delighted to learn that

we have not called upon the assistance of any member of the despised sex.

Dr Gray Well, that's fortunate for me, I'm sure. I find so many objecting to my practice of my profession because of my petticoats, that I am certainly glad to find some supporters. Now if you'll just turn on the electric lights—(*rises, looking around for lights*)

Bessie Don't mention them!

Dr Gray Well, perhaps we had better keep it dark. I'll get busy. But tell me first why you all have such a decided aversion for men.

Pamela (*as Dr Gray looks at her*) My life is ruined. (*weeps*)

Mrs Green (*as Dr Gray turns to her*) And mine came close to the very brink of despair before I was left to this present glorious state of freedom.

Elizabeth (*as Dr Gray turns to her*) I have always steered clear of the masculine sex. They have no attractions for me. I have no attractions for them.

Dr Gray (*looking her over significantly, smiling wisely*) I see. (*turns to Grace*) And why don't you like the men?

Grace Because Mamma won't let me.

Mrs Green (*arm around Bessie leads her drooping to Dr Gray*) And now, even today, to complete my misery, my daughter—my first one, you know, only a month married, mind you;—has come home to me in tears. Abuse and neglect of that peculiar kind known only to males, has driven her back to the shelter of her childhood's home, and back to the comforting tenderness of the maternal bosom. (*draws Bessie's head to her shoulder, Bessie weeps*)

Dr Gray What had happened?

Grace That's what I'd like to know. (*Mrs Green leads Bessie to sofa*)

Dr Gray (*looking from one to another*) Can it not be straightened?

Pamela Who can ever straighten out matrimonial tangles?

Dr Gray (*crosses to Bessie at sofa*) My poor little lady, I am indeed sorry for you. Maybe I can prescribe for that broken heart, too. You are too young, both in years and in experience, to be so unhappy. Won't you tell me what is wrong? Perhaps I have some medicine somewhere about me that will cure you.

Bessie Why, I don't mind telling you. Are you married?

Dr Gray Yes—several years.

All What?

Bessie And yet you don't hate the men?

Dr Gray Certainly not. Why should I? My husband and I are the best of comrades. I took up the study of medicine so that we could work together, you know, and we are on the same staff at the Presbyterian hospital. Just believe me, little woman I know all about married life. I've seen every phase and form of it. You can trust me.

Bessie Well, this morning, at breakfast,—(*hesitates*)—did you see the morning papers?

Dr Gray Certainly.

Bessie O did you? And did you read all those wonderful bargains at Jones?

Dr Gray (*smiling*) I don't remember. I'm not much interested in bargains, myself.

All You aren't?

Dr Gray No, indeed. I never want to get anything cheap—not even a husband. But go on.

Bessie Well, at breakfast this morning, Dick—he's my husband, you know—(*Dr Gray nods*)—well, he was reading the paper at breakfast this morning, and I could read all about those bargains on the back of his sheet, and—and—

Dr Gray Yes.

Bessie Well, of course I was just wild to get hold of it.

Grace Of course.

Bessie Of course, I didn't say a word. But I—I—I just kept looking and waiting for him to lay it down. They were perfectly fascinating—some of the things they advertised—handkerchiefs, shirt waists, silk stockings, and—and—other things, you know.

Dr Gray Yes, yes. Go on.

Bessie Well, after he finished breakfast, he just folded that paper right up, mind you and put it in his overcoat pocket.

All (*shocked*) Oh!

Bessie And took it down town with him, advertising page and all.

Pamela The heartless wretch.

Elizabeth Brute.

Mrs Green Unfeeling creature.

Bessie I cried, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried, and I cried. And then I just made up my mind to come straight home to Manma. She never hid the papers away from me. She never carried them away from the house all folded up in her pocket. She never—

Mrs Green (*throwing arm around her*) Of course not. When she wanted to read the papers, she could just read the papers, so she could.

Pamela Bless her heart.

Dr Gray (*puzzled*) But is that all?

All (*astonished that she could ask for more*) All?

Dr Gray Yes. Just this? Is there no other complaint?

Bessie O no. He's always been just perfectly lovely to me, every other way.

Dr Gray Then, my dear, if I were you, I certainly would forgive him, and go right straight home.

All Home?

Dr Gray Certainly.

Bessie Back to Dick?

Dr Gray Yes. And I'd hurry, too, so to have supper all ready for him before he gets there.

All (stepping forward) But—(*Dr Gray stops them with wave of hand*)

Dr Gray Listen. How could he know that you would care to read the old dry stuff—er—er—I mean, of course, the charming advertisements—unless you told him?

Bessie (thoughtfully) Why, that's so. But I'd let *him* read it anyway, whether he wanted to or not.

Dr Gray But men are a little different from women in some things.

Elizabeth Should say so.

Pamela (nodding at *Elizabeth*) I found it so.

Mrs Green And, true enough, what could you expect from—

All A mere man.

Grace (in disappointed voice) Are you sure that this was all that happened, *Bessie*?

Bessie Wasn't that enough?

Grace Fudge. Wasn't there even a quarrel, or a swear-word, or a fuss of any kind? (*Bessie shakes head*) From the way everybody acted, I supposed you had been dragged around the room by the hair of your head, and beaten black and blue.

Pamela (sentimentally shaking head) There are wounds to the soul far more cruel than an injury to the mere flesh.

Elizabeth Why didn't you ask him for the paper, *Bessie*?

Mrs Green Or else take it away from him?

Bessie I—I—I was afraid.

Pamela (sharply) Of what, pray?

Bessie He might laugh.

Pamela Bosh!

Elizabeth It was certainly foolish of you, Bessie, to say the least. If I were ever to be married—which may Heaven and my good sense forbid—I would still have my own way. I would be bossed and overpowered by no mere man.

Bessie But I—I I'm different. I—I—I guess I'd better go home. (*looks at each in turn, much frightened, scarcely daring to speak*)

Dr. Gray (*arm around her*) That's splendid, Mrs. Brown. I think so, too. (*others look at one another, shrugging shoulders and raising eyebrows, shaking heads*)

Grace And so do I, Bessie, if that's all the sense you've got. And as for me, this "tempest" has been really "much ado about nothing" and I've made up my mind that I shall certainly marry when I find the right fellow,—

All (*shocked*) Grace!

Grace Even if I do have to be the wife of—

All (*holding up hands in horror*) A mere man!

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